

DEFENCE
OF
METHODISM;

DELIVERED EXTEMPORARY

IN A

PUBLIC DEBATE,

(BUT NOW CONSIDERABLY ENLARGED,)

Held in LONDON, December 12. 19, and 26, 1785.

On the following Question,

Have the Methodists done most GOOD or EVIL?

By THOMAS OLIVERS.

WHAT HATH GOD WROUGHT!

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Mr. PRESIDENT,

THE Question before us is, Have the Methodists done most Good or Evil? Now this supposes, first, That they have done both good and evil, otherwise it would be absurd to enquire which they have done most of; and, secondly, it supposes, That they have done both in nearly the same degree; otherwise it would not admit of any dispute, much less of one so large* as this we are now engaged in. This then being the true state of the Question, I undertake to demonstrate that it is both absurd and blasphemous.

And, first, It is absurd. For it supposes that the same fountain sends forth bitter water and sweet; that the same tree bears good and evil fruit: and that they both do this in nearly the same degree. Besides, it totally destroys that rule of judging given by our Lord, By their fruit ye shall know them. For if the same tree bears good and

* This Speech was delivered on the third night.

evil fruit, how shall we be able to judge by the fruit whether the tree be good or evil. In like manner, if the Methodists bear these opposite fruits, how can the world judge whether they are false prophets or true? whether sent of God or of the Devil?

Again. Our Lord says, A good man, out of the good treasure of his heart, bringeth forth good things, and (not the same, but) an evil man, out of the evil treasure of his heart, bringeth forth evil things. Now the question, in its present form, turns this into the greatest absurdity. For it supposes that one of these may have both these treasures in his heart, bringing forth good and evil things! That is, it supposes that he may be a good and an evil man at the same time, and have a good and an evil treasure in his heart, bringing forth these opposite things! which is a most palpable absurdity.

Secondly, It is blasphemous. In proof of this let it be observed, that, according to the Scriptures, good and evil are brought into being by the assistance of spiritual agencies: good, by the assistance of God, and evil, by that of the devil. Hence, speaking of good, they say, All the good that is done upon earth, the Lord doeth it, and that it is God who worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure. On the
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other hand, all moral evil is attributed to the agency of Satan. Therefore he is said to work, with energy, in the children of disobedience; and in particular, to have beguiled Eve, and to have put it into the heart of Ananias and Sapphira to lie unto the Holy Ghost.

Now as the question before us supposes that good and evil are both done by the Methodists, it must suppose that there is communion between light and darkness, and concord between Christ and Belial: the one working in, and by the Methodists all the good they do, and the other all the evil: and which works hardest, Christ in helping them to do good, or Belial in helping them to do evil, is the blasphemous point we are this night to determine!

Perhaps it is owing to this great impropriety of the question, that no one has yet so much as attempted to speak directly to it: that is, that no one has once offered to shew, What good and evil the Methodists have done; and then which is the greatest. Instead of this, the Opposers of Methodism have aimed at nothing but Ridicule and Abuse: therefore their Advocates have hitherto thought it quite enough to answer those false and ridiculous accusations.

Nor indeed is it possible to speak directly to the question, in its present form, with any degree of propriety: therefore I shall take the liberty to amend it, and only ask, Have the Methodists done Good or Evil?

In speaking to the question thus amended, I shall shew, first, who the Methodists are. Then secondly, enquire, Whether they have done good or evil?

And, First, I am to shew, who the Methodists are. And, first, it is certain that those who were dead a hundred years before any Methodist was born, cannot be taken into the account. Therefore to impute to them the absurdities of John of Munster, or of Nailor of Bristol, or of any other who lived a hundred, or a hundred and fifty years ago, is an insult both on Methodism and common sense.

Secondly, There are several Denominations of Christians now living, who are frequently called Methodists, who do not belong to them. For instance; the Moravians, the Independents, the Baptists, the Antinomians; together with many ministers and congregations, who, in every sense of the word, belong to the church of England. Now though many of these preach the same doctrines, and entertain a favourable opinion of
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the Methodists; and though, on the other hand, the Methodists very highly esteem many of these; yet they cannot, with any propriety, be called Methodists. For, first, their names were never entered in any Register of the Methodist societies. Secondly, they were never subject to those rules and regulations by which the Methodists are governed. Thirdly, they do not so much as bear the Methodist-name, unless it be imposed on them, and then they generally disown, and disclaim it. Nor, fourthly, were they ever acknowledged by the Methodists, as any part of their community. As to some of these, the Antinomians, they are professedly, as great enemies to the laws of Methodism, as they are to the laws of God! To impute, therefore, the follies of these, or of any other of the above denominations, to the Methodists, is absurd and cruel.

Thirdly. Neither can the question intend any mere Individual, as such; seeing it speaks, in the plural, of "the Methodists." Now there are several sorts of individuals, called Methodists, who must be excluded from the business in hand. As first, such as are, or have been called Methodists, who never were in any connexion with them. Of this sort I knew an instance when I was a boy.

boy. A man in a gown and cassock preaching in the town where I was, passed for a Methodist: but when the mob began to be unruly he cried out, "I am no Methodist." Now had this man been guilty of any irregularity, (which I know not that he was) doubtless it would have been set down to the Methodists' account. Another sort of individuals, almost always called Methodists, are those who have been expelled for their evil practices. Persons of this sort have too frequently been found in all denominations of Christians: even that small number which followed our Lord while he was on earth, for sometime had a Judas among them. Now, whatever other communities do, when the Methodists discover an unholy walker among them, they first endeavour to reclaim him; but if they cannot do this, they then put him away from their societies. And though this is all they can do, or ought to do, for the honour of God, and for their own credit, yet the evil practices of such persons continue to be imputed to the Methodists; yea, though they have been out of that connexion for a great number of years.

A third sort of individuals unjustly called Methodists, are those who are Apostates from Methodism; those who have made shipwreck
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of faith and of a good conscience. Now apostates are well known to be often some of the bitterest enemies the people have from whom they have apostatized. Witness Satan, the original Apostate; who ever since his apostasy has been doing all in his power, against God and man: witness Alexander the copper-smith, in the apostle's days, whom St. Paul said had done him much wrong: witness Julian the Apostate, who, after his apostasy, became one of the greatest persecutors the Christians ever had. Add to these, the two principle opposers of Methodism on this occasion. These gentlemen, in the presence of this assembly, have avowed their apostacy from Methodism, in the most explicit terms, and then have poured out such torrents of low and scandalous abuse, on those who were once their brethren, as is shocking to every Christian ear. Among many other instances one of them has said, "The Methodists have thronged Bedlam with lunatics: made Tyburn groan with criminals; and quite crouded the bottomless pit!" Now I ask every man of sense, if these, and the like, are not fine gentry to be fathered on the Methodists? Or rather if it is not great injustice to make them responsible for the conduct of such virulent Apostates!

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But if these are not, who then are the Methodists? I answer, Those who are members of the several societies instituted by the original founders of Methodism. Now these are the Rev. John Wesley, and the late Rev. George Whitefield. All therefore who are members of the societies, instituted and established by these, and who are governed by the rules and regulations they have laid down, are properly, "The Methodists."

Having shewn who the Methodists are, I proceed, Secondly, to enquire, whether they have done Good or Evil?

But before I do this, it is necessary to make a few observations on the different ways of doing good and evil. Now these may be done two ways: directly, and indirectly; or rather properly and accidentally. Good and evil are done directly, or properly, when the cause naturally produces the effect. They are done improperly, or accidentally, when an effect follows which does not naturally or properly belong to the cause. For instance; you see a person in danger of dying for want of bread. From a principle of humanity you *design* to save him. In order to this end, you give him a piece of bread, which is an immediate, and natural *cause* of producing the effect you intended

tended. But this cause cannot produce this effect, unless the person receives, and uses the bread in a proper manner. But he does so receive and use it, and of consequence his life is saved. Here then is good done immediately and directly, as the effect has naturally followed the cause. But good may be done accidentally. One man seeing another, whom he supposes to be his enemy, *intends* to kill him. In order to this end, he thrusts a sword through his body. But the sword, missing the vitals, opens an imposthume, whereby his enemy's life is saved. Now here was evil *intended*, and evil *means* made use of to bring it to pass; but notwithstanding both, good accidentally followed.

In like manner evil may be done directly and accidentally. And first, directly. A man on seeing his enemy, *intends* to kill him. For this purpose he runs a sword through his heart; the consequence is, his enemy drops down dead at his feet: as must be the case, seeing the cause naturally produced the effect. This evil then was not accidental, but natural, immediate and direct. On the other hand, evil may be done accidentally. For instance. You see a boy in danger of dying for want. You *design* to save him. For *that end* you give him a piece of bread.

bread. But by a careless use of it, a crumb sticks in his throat and suffocates him, and in a short time he expires. Now if you had not intended to have saved him, you would not have given him the bread ; and if you had not done this, it would not have occasioned his death. It is therefore certain that what you did was a cause of his death : seeing he would not have died, by means of that bread, if you had not given it him. But as this evil did not happen, as a natural consequence of your generosity ; but rather through the carelessness, or wantonness of him you gave it to, the evil was intirely accidental with respect to you.

Now as to this last sort of evil, there is nothing excellent or praise-worthy, which is not liable to it. For instance ; when God created angels and men, his *design* was only good : viz. that they might glorify him, and be happy to all eternity. And the *means* which he made use of in creating them, or rather the manner in which he created them, was perfectly consonant with his design. For he created them in his own image ; endued with reason and understanding ; with liberty to chuse the good, and refuse the evil ; that they might be capable of a greater reward, by performing a free and voluntary obedience. But
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notwithstanding the Creator only *intended* good, and created men in a *manner* which was most likely to promote that end; yet much evil ensued, viz. all the sin and misery which began presently after their creation, and which will last to all eternity. Now if men and angels had not been created, this evil could not have happened; but as it was no part of their Creator's *design*, nor naturally followed from the *manner* of their creation; but arose merely from the abuse of their liberty, which God intended only for their good, the evil was certainly accidental.

Again, when God entered into covenant with Abraham he *intended* great good both to him and his family; and also that in him all the families of the earth should be blessed. And there is no doubt but the terms of that covenant corresponded with his design, otherwise a God of infinite wisdom and goodness would not have given them. But notwithstanding this, the perverseness of men occasioned much accidental evil to proceed therefrom: such as the tyranny of the Egyptians, and the oppressions of the Hebrews. This tyranny also occasioned all the plagues which fell on that hardened people, in their own land, and at last their overthrow in the red sea. And all the evils which beset the Israelites and their enemies, both

in the wilderness, and in the land of Canaan, happened in the same way; so that these may properly be called accidental evils.

Christianity likewise is subject to this sort of evil. Undoubtedly the *design* of God in this was, the greatest good that a sinful world was capable of; being nothing less than their present and eternal salvation. And *what he did*, in order to this end, was the most perfect display of divine wisdom and goodness ever made known to angels or men. Yet we all know that great evils were occasioned thereby, which otherwise could never have happened: such as the oppositions of the Jews and Gentiles, on the one hand, and all the sufferings of Christ and his followers on the other.

If we descend to particulars, we shall find that every part of Christianity is liable to accidental evil. For instance, the birth of Christ was the accidental cause of the slaughter of the infants, by the order of Herod: the fasting of Christ in the wilderness was the accidental cause of Satan's horrid and blasphemous temptations; the miracles of Christ accidentally occasioned the blasphemies of the Scribes and Pharisees: the preaching of Christ thus occasioned the opposition he met with on that account: the crucifixion of Christ thus occasioned the insults he received in the judgment-hall
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and on Calvary: and the resurrection of Christ was the accidental cause of the rulers suborning the soldiers to say, His disciples came and stole him away while we were asleep. Add to this, that the existence of the word of God is the accidental cause of men wresting it to their own destruction: the preaching of the Apostles was thus the cause of its becoming the favour of death unto death unto many. Again. Wherever the grace of God is turned unto wantonness, we must say, that it is remotely or accidentally the cause of that abuse; for if that grace had never existed, it could not possibly have been thus abused.

Once more. The Reformation has been productive of much accidental evil. Undoubtedly the *design* of our first Reformers was only the good of the church of Christ. And the *means* they made use of, in exposing the superstitions and idolatries of the church of Rome, were the most likely to accomplish their design. Notwithstanding these, much evil followed: viz. all the persecutions the Papists were guilty of, and all the martyrdoms, and other sufferings, the Protestants endured. But as all these persecutions and sufferings were contrary both to the design of the Reformers, and to the natural tendency of what

they did ; they were accidental evils, and therefore not to be imputed to the Reformers, as faults of theirs.

In like manner, Methodism has been attended with much accidental evil. Undoubtedly the original founders of Methodism had a *good design*. Had they aimed at ease, they would not have voluntarily undertaken the hardest labours ; much less have continued therein. Had they wished for the praise that cometh of men, they would not, knowingly and wilfully, have exposed themselves to almost universal reproach, And had they aimed at riches, they would have gone to the rich and great, and not to the most poor and indigent. Their *design*, therefore, must be supposed to be, The glory of God, and the good of men. And the *means* they made use of were the most likely to accomplish their design. For not being satisfied with what they felt in themselves, and saw in those about them, who were reputed good Christians, they determined, with much prayer and fasting, to search the Original Scriptures, to see what real Christianity was : whether there was any thing more contained therein, than doing no harm, and doing good, and using the ordinances of God. They had not gone on long this way, before they discovered,

discovered, that Christianity required a right state of mind, consisting of right tempers and desires, and that from hence right words and actions were to proceed. No sooner were they thoroughly convinced of this, than they began to be in earnest in seeking it for themselves: then in recommending it to those who came in their way, who had any inclination to hear them. They then went to the prisons, and recommended it to the most wretched criminals. At last they boldly preached the religion of the heart to the whole University. From Oxford they came to London, and insisted on the same doctrine there in many of the churches. After a short stay in London, they went to America, to convert the Indians to this religion. After attempting this they returned to London, where their congregations were much greater than they had been before. After awhile, the principle inhabitants of the several parishes where these gentlemen preached, complained that they were greatly incommoded by the immense multitudes which came to hear. The consequence was, that first one church, then another, and at last, all the churches were shut against them. On this they went into Moorfields, and divers other places, preaching the kingdom of God to thousands, and tens of thousands, of all sorts of people; but

chiefly to such as would not hear it in any other place. After doing this for a while in, and about London, they went to Bristol, and did the same there. From thence they went, with their lives in their hands, to the most ignorant and savage parts of the nation, and preached Christ and his kingdom to the colliers in Kingswood, Newcastle, and Staffordshire: then to the tanners in Cornwall: and at last, to almost every city, town and village in the three kingdoms. And thus one of them, the great and good Mr. Whitefield, went on to his dying day; and thus the truly venerable Mr. Wesley goes on, with unabating ardour, to this day, although he is now between Eighty and Ninety years of age.

And what has been said of these great and good men, to whose labours these kingdoms owe so much, may in a good measure be said of those, who from time to time, have laboured with them. For the event has abundantly shewn, that those in general, set out with a single eye; and that the same good intention has influenced them in following the steps of their leaders.

Now, whoever considers the scriptural accounts of former ages, the histories of later dates, and the state mankind is in at present; will soon
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be convinced, that a great variety of accidental evils must follow such a work. Men of influence, who have no religion, will cry out against those who endeavour to be better than themselves: men of mere outside religion, like the pharisees of old, will exclaim against those who are seeking the kingdom of God within them: hypocrites and deceivers are sure to have something to say, against those who profess to be true of heart: and all these will stir up the rabble to be guilty of various, and great outrages. So it was in the days of Christ and his apostles; so it was in the following ages of the church; and so it has been among the Methodists. Men of learning, fortune, power, and influence, invented or propagated evil reports; hence arose a great variety of barefaced calumnies and slanders. By these the rabble were encouraged to insult the persons, and destroy the property of the Methodists. By these means, not only one neighbour was often set against another, but there were frequent disturbances in families. As our Lord said, there were five in a house, three against two, and two against three: the father against his son, and the son against his father; the mother against her daughter, and the daughter against her mother; the mother-in-law against her daughter-in-

in-law, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; so that a man's foes where often those of his own household. Now had these evils been a thousand times greater than they were, as they were not natural and direct consequence of Methodism; but rather accidental consequences, which followed from the abuse thereof, the Methodists are no more to be blamed on account thereof, than the Reformers are for the abuse of the Reformation; or Christ, for the abuse of Christianity; or God, for the evils which were occasioned by his entering into covenant with Abraham, or for the abuse which men and angels made of the creation of the world.

We will therefore put accidental evil entirely out of the question; and ask, Secondly, Have the Methodists done evil immediately and directly? If they have, it has been either by their Doctrine or their Discipline. But have they done it by their Doctrine? That this may be fairly and fully understood, let us see what their doctrine is. And, first, They teach that all men are sinners by nature and practice. Secondly, That Christ died to save sinners. Thirdly, That men must unfeignedly repent of all their sins. Fourthly, That they must believe the Gospel. Fifthly, That all who thus repent and believe,

believe, are justified; that is, pardoned and accepted of God. Sixthly, That all who are thus pardoned, ought to love God with all their hearts, mind, soul, and strength. Seventhly, That he that loves God, ought to love his brother also: yea, that he ought to love his neighbour (every man, friend and enemy) as himself. Eighthly, That all who thus believe and love, ought to be careful to maintain good works. Ninthly, That every Christian ought to endeavour to be holy in all manner of conversation, as he who hath called him is holy. Tenthly, That while they are in this world, they ought to grow in Grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Eleventhly, That he that endures unto the end the same shall be saved. Twelfthly, That they who have thus done good, shall go to the Resurrection of Life; but they that have done evil, to the Resurrection of Damnation.

Now I appeal to every one who is acquainted with the doctrine of the Methodists, if this is not the sum thereof: if the particulars above mentioned, are not the points chiefly insisted on both among Mr. Wesley's and Mr. Whitefield's followers. If so, I shall be glad to know if there is any tendency in these doctrines, whether taken
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separately, or in conjunction with each other, to do evil. Has that which teaches the fall and actual wickedness of man? Does it not rather tend to humble him? Has the doctrine of the atonement? What! the doctrine which points out the love of God in giving his Son to save us from our sins? Has the doctrine of repentance, which teaches us to be sorry for our sins, and that we should immediately forsake them, such a tendency? Is there any tendency to evil in the doctrine of faith: which insist on our coming to Christ for the salvation he has purchased for us? Has the doctrine of justification, of pardon and adoption for every penitent believer, any tendency to do evil? Or these which teach that we ought to love God with all our heart, and our neighbour as ourselves? Or those which inculcate the necessity of good works, of growing in grace, of universal holiness, of perseverance in the ways of God, or of eternal rewards and punishments? I say, is there any thing that bears the smallest resemblance of a tendency to do evil in any of these?

But has not their Discipline done evil? Let us examine this point with candour and impartiality. The substance of their discipline is as follows, First, No person is admitted into their societies

Societies who is known to live in open sin. Secondly, When admitted, he is required to hear, read, and meditate on the word of God as frequently as he can. Thirdly, Each member is expected to pray, in public, in his family, and in private. Fourthly, He must assemble with his brethren, for mutual edification, at every stated opportunity, if health and business will admit. Fifthly, He is expected to receive the supper of the Lord at every proper opportunity. Sixthly, 'Tis also expected of him to use fasting or abstinence, as often as health, business, and opportunity serves. Seventhly, 'Tis moreover required of him to be merciful after his power, to the bodies and souls of men. Eighthly, In order to this end, it is expected that he be not slothful in business; but rather work with his hands, the things that are right, that he may owe no man any thing; that he may provide, for himself and family, things lawful in the sight of all men; and have to give to him that needeth. Ninthly, It is required of him to shew a good example to all men, that the Gospel be not blamed. Now this is the substance of the Methodist discipline, which certainly (to say no more at present) can have no tendency to do evil.

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But if they have not done evil, what have they done? I answer, They have done much Good. But what good have they done? Spiritual and Temporal good. And, first, they have done spiritual good. For first they have been instruments in turning the most ignorant, vulgar, and ridiculous sinners from darkness to light. Multitudes who, before they heard the Methodists, knew neither themselves nor God, are now well acquainted with both. As to themselves, they know that they were shapen in iniquity, and that in sin did their mother conceive them. They know that on that account their heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. In other words, they know that they have in them a carnal mind which is enmity against God, which is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be—till it is renewed. They know also that this evil nature is the Source from whence all outward wickedness proceeds; that it is this Fountain which sends forth all the corrupt streams of outward sin. Again, they know as all men are sinners by nature and practice, that they are condemned already, that the wrath of God *now* abideth on them. Again, they know that this state of sin and condemnation is an infallible source of present

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Misery : that it is on this account the wicked are like the troubled sea which cannot rest, whose waves cast up mire and dirt ; that destruction—eternal destruction, and misery—present misery are in their path, and that the way of peace they have not known. Once more. They know that they cannot save themselves, that they cannot bring a clean thing out of an unclean, that they cannot make themselves new creatures, and that if it is not done in time, they cannot be holy or happy here, much less saved to all eternity.

And as for God, They know that he is, and that he is a Rewarder of those that diligently seek him. They know that in Him they live, and move, and have their being. They know that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them. They know that God commandeth all men every where to repent, and also to believe the Gospel. They know that all who do this are justified and born of God. They know that all such have the kingdom of God within them, even righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. They know that from this inward principle, all good works, yea, all holiness and happiness proceed. And they know that this

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inward and outward religion is the gift of God; that it comes *from* the Father, *through* the Son, *by* the Holy Ghost; and that therefore all the praise belongs to Him in Time and Eternity.

If any one doubt, of their having this knowledge, he may soon satisfy himself: only let him go into any city, town or village, where Methodism has prevailed, and enquire first, what sort of people the Methodists formerly were, with respect to knowledge; and then let him converse with them a single hour on any of the above particulars, and he will doubt no longer.

Again, As the Methodists have turned many from darkness to light, so also, have they from the power of Satan unto God. Surely, if ever any were taken captive by the devil at his will, many of these were in a very high degree. It is dreadful to conceive what slaves to sin, and what enemies to all that is good, multitudes of them were: what pride, passion, and evil desires: and what lust, cruelty, and injustice, filled, and governed their hearts. And from this corrupt fountain issued forth abundance of polluted streams: on this evil tree grew a large quantity of evil fruit, such as drunkenness, whoredom, cursing, swearing, lying, fighting, thieving, sabbath-breaking, gaming, extortion, oppression and the like.

like. But by hearing the Methodists, the Lions became Lambs: the proud became humble, the passionate became meek and gentle, the unclean became chaste, the cruel became merciful, and the unjust became honest. And being thus inwardly reformed, changed, and converted, they became new creatures in their outward behaviour. Drunkenness, uncleanness, and lying, gave place to sobriety, chastity, and truth. The mouths that formerly were filled with oaths, curses and blasphemies, were filled with prayer and praise. The sabbaths that were formerly broken and profaned, were now employed in the service of God. The time which was once spent in gaming, idleness, and vain amusements, was now improved in reading, and holy meditation. And in the place of fighting, cruelty, fraud and oppression, there was justice, and mercy, and every good work.

Now that the Methodists have been instrumental in thus reforming multitudes, is too notorious to be denied; yet if any doubt of it, let them go to Kingswood, and Cornwall; let them go to Newcastle, Coleford, Wednesbury, and Whitehaven; let them go to Leeds, Sheffield, Manchester, and Liverpool; let them go to Birmingham, Wolverhampton, and Chester; let them go to

Norwich, Bath and Bristol: nay, let them only go to the most wretched parts of this metropolis, and they will soon find abundant proof of all I have asserted; they will soon be fully satisfied, that multitudes in these places, who were once the reproach of Christianity, the pests of society, the plagues of their neighbours, the curse of their families, and a scandal to human nature; are now sober, holy, christian men.

Secondly, They have done Temporal good. Before the persons above referred to, heard the Methodists, many of them were in a state of deplorable poverty and wretchedness: having neither food to eat, nor raiment to put on; nor always so much as a little clean straw to lie on. At the same time they were so deeply in debt, and so far from any likelihood of paying it, that they had quite lost their credit: and had it not been for the humanity of their neighbours, and the scanty provision made for them by the laws of their country, they and their families must have perished together. As this was owing, partly to idleness, and partly to drunkenness, gaming, and other extravagancies: on hearing the Methodists, and becoming earnest in the work of their salvation, there was an end of all these evils. The consequence was, they soon
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got food for themselves and families : next a little plain, decent apparel ; then a little necessary furniture. Having thus procured a few necessities, they began to pay their debts, and after awhile they owed no man any thing. Going on in the ways of virtue, they continued to use all diligence and frugality. By these means, they were enabled to procure things a little more comfortable for themselves, and now and then to spare a little to the most necessitous. By still continuing to use all diligence and frugality, they were enabled to enlarge their Bounty. At length, having it in their power, they began to do good unto all men, especially unto the household of faith. Nor did they overlook that word, Lend to him that would borrow of thee ; for when it was proper and convenient, they were now as willing to lend, as they were formerly to borrow of others. Still going on in the good way, they were soon able to lay by a little for future contingencies. To this they added a little more : till at last many of them became possessed of hundreds, and some of them of many thousands. Now as these are facts which cannot be denied, I conclude that the Methodists have done both Spiritual and Temporal good.

But, Secondly, what is the Extent of this good? What is the Number of those who have been thus benefited by Methodism? To ascertain the exact number is impossible to any child of man. None but God, who knoweth all things, can do this. All that we can do is, by a general calculation, to come as near the truth of the matter as possible. And in order to this end, I shall observe, First, That there are above Ninety *Thousand members at this time in the different Societies under Mr. Wesley's care; and we cannot suppose there are less than Ten †Thousand in the Societies instituted by the late Mr. Whitefield: in all, about a Hundred Thousand. Secondly, let us suppose that in the long space of fifty or sixty years, there could not be less than a Hundred Thousand more, who from time to time, have formerly been members of these Societies: multitudes of whom have yearly been

* At the time of this debate I said, About Seventy Thousand; but in last August, the exact number was Ninety Thousand, Three Hundred and Eighty Six: including those in America and the West-Indies.

† One reason of the great disproportion between the above number is, Mr. Whitefield never thought it his duty to establish societies wherever he preached, as Mr. Wesley did; nor, of course, to encourage so many preachers.

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going to God ; multitudes more who have continually been joining other religious Societies ; and vast numbers who after enduring for awhile, went back into the world. Now very few, if any of these were suffered to become Members of these Societies, without evident marks of having received some benefit by first hearing the word : they were at least, a little enlightened, and at the same time thoroughly reformed in their outward behaviour. Indeed, the far greater part of them experienced a much deeper work ; being more deeply awakened, and made much more in earnest for their salvation. Here then are about Two Hundred Thousand souls who have received good (some in one degree, and others in another) by means of Methodism.

Again, Those who are constant and frequent hearers of the Methodists, in town and country are (taking one place with another) about five times as many as those who are members of the Societies. Now these, one with another, have heard the Methodists about twice a week. And we cannot suppose that they have so often heard that word which was made so great a blessing to others, without receiving some blessing themselves. Indeed many of them have received very material good, as their general behaviour abundantly

dantly shews. And as to the rest, if they were only enlightened and reformed a little, this, certainly is some good. Now when these are added to the former number, they make in all about Twelve Hundred Thousand souls.

Add to these such as have been occasional hearers; and those who have frequently visited Methodist families, where religious worship, and Christian conversation are kept up; and those who have laboured or travelled with zealous Methodists, or otherwise fallen into company with them, and have been instructed, exhorted, warned and admonished by them, here must be an addition of very many thousands more to whom they have been of use.

Again, Suppose there has been only a single Methodist in a family, and two or three in a neighbourhood, twenty or thirty in a country village, two or three hundred in a large trading town, and three or four times that number in a city; if each of these has been as a city upon a hill which cannot be hid, and as a candle upon a candlestick which gives light to all in the house, Thousands, Tens of Thousands, Hundreds of Thousands, who have seen their good works, must, sooner or later, in some degree or other be benefited thereby.

Again,

Again, There have been (and still are) many holy, useful ministers, both in the Church of England, and among the various sorts of Dissenters, whose religion (and consequently their usefulness) originated with the Methodists. Now as these have frequently been of use in enlightening, reclaiming, and converting sinners, this must (under God) be attributed to the Methodists. For in all likelihood, if these ministers had never heard the Methodists, they would not have been converted; and if they had not been converted, they had never been instrumental in doing the good they have; of consequence the main of their usefulness, if not every tittle of it proceeded from the Methodists.

Again, In the course of fifty years many religious books have been published by the Methodists, and others who sprung from them. Now as these in general are not only argumentative, but likewise plain, practical, and persuasive; they have been of unspeakable service to multitudes. And as it has often happened that they have fallen into the hands of a great variety of persons at home and abroad, who never heard the Methodists, or conversed with them: we have reason to believe, both from the nature of the books, and from the good effects we have known them to have had upon

upon others, that many of these have been much benefited by reading them. Nor is this mere conjecture ; for we have known many instances even of persons of character who have been very materially benefited by reading Mr. Wesley's Appeals, Sermons, and various other Tracts.

Again, We all know that in St. Paul's days there were those who preached Christ out of contention, and that the apostle rejoiced therein ; not doubting but good was done thereby. In like manner, when the Methodists made a noise in the world, many of the Clergy began to bestir themselves, and took much more pains both in preaching and living. Nor is this mere imagination ; for we have known many instances of this kind in every part of the three kingdoms. Now as we must believe that much good has been done, even by this means, and as we are certain that Methodism gave occasion to it ; we must view it as a farther display of the good the Methodists have done.

Once more, He who lays a firm foundation whereon to build a stately edifice, or plants a large vineyard, which promises a fruitful vintage, or sows an extensive field which almost assures us of a plentiful harvest ; certainly does good. Now all this the Methodists have done. They have

have laid such a firm foundation ; they have planted such a large vineyard ; they have cultivated and sown so wide a field ; by enlightning, reforming, and converting so many, Thousands and Tens of Thousands, that if they go on, as hitherto they have done, ages unborn, and nations who never yet so much as heard of their name, will bless God in Time and Eternity, that such a people ever existed.

Seeing then that the Methodists have been instrumental in doing Spiritual and Temporal good, in a higher or lower degree, to Thousands of Thousands ; and seeing they have laid a broad and firm foundation for a much greater work in futurity ; I conclude that they have done Good, and not Evil ; and that they have done it in a most marvellous Degree.

Perhaps it may be worth while to subjoin a few short answers to several objections urged against the Methodists on this occasion.

And first, It has been said, " They are Schismatics, in departing from the Church of England." I answer, They do not depart so far from her as is allowed by the Act of Toleration ; nor so far as all the Dissenters do ; nor so far as the Church of England did from the Church of Rome, nor so far as Christ and his Apostles did
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from the Church of Jerusalem. Nor do they at all depart from her, either in doctrine or affection; nor farther from her Rights and Ceremonies, than they can with Prudence, and Safety avoid.

Query. Is not this charge of Schism a reflection both on the Act of Toleration and those who made it? For if it be real Schism to dissent from the Ceremonies of the established Church, what sort of Lawgivers are those who give sanction to an Act which tolerates Schism? But if it is not, what sort of subjects are those who criminate both the laws of their country, and those who act only according to their dictates?

Secondly, It has been said, "They are Enthusiasts, in pretending to receive the Spirit, and to be influenced thereby." I answer, They make no pretence but to the ordinary operations of the Spirit: which is nothing more than what every Christian Church under the heavens does, in its Liturgies, Articles, Creed, Catechisms and Confessions: particularly, the Churches of England, Scotland, and Ireland; with every body of Dissenters in these lands. If then the Methodists are Enthusiasts on this account, so also is the whole Christian World.

Thirdly, It was said, "They are uncharitable, in confining Salvation to themselves." To this I answer,

answer, They do no such thing. What they believe, and say, is this: every one that repents of his sins, believes in Christ, and loves God and his neighbour will be saved, whatever Church he is of. And on the other hand, he that does not thus repent, believe, and love, he, and he only, they say, will be damned. All the clamour, therefore, concerning the uncharitableness of the Methodists, concerning their confining salvation to themselves, and damning all besides, is meer Slander, and Abuse, as every one knows who has ever heard them.

Fourthly. It was said, "There are very wicked persons among them." I answer, There never was a Christian church on earth, consisting of fifty members, who, sooner or later, had not those among them who did not adorn their profession. In the Apostles' time they had Spots in their feasts of Charity; and even among the Twelve, who were in the closest connexion with our Lord, there was one who had a devil. It would be strange, therefore, if in a body consisting of a Hundred Thousand members, there should be none who walked in a disorderly manner. But suppose there were fifty that did so, this would not be enough to criminate the whole body, seeing such are in nowise allowed among them.

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For when a person of that sort is discovered, if they cannot reclaim him, they cut him off as a withered branch, according to the word of Christ, and the example of his Apostles. If he repent they receive him again; if not, he is no more admitted into their Societies. Now here I ask, Does every Christian Church under the heavens do this? Do those in Great Britain and Ireland? If not, with what face can those who do it not, find fault with the Methodists in this respect.

Fifthly. It has been said, "They make use of very uncouth and absurd expressions." I answer, Perhaps they sometimes may. And is this to be wondered at? Would it not rather be a wonder, if every member of such a community, should always express himself with the utmost accuracy? Was such a thing ever known among any other people? "But the preachers themselves use uncouth expressions." Perhaps they may, and perhaps they may not. It has sometimes happened that the uncouthness was in the ears of those who heard them. For though St. Paul had been speaking the words of Truth and Sobriety, so uncouth were the ears of Festus, that he cried out, Paul! thou art besides thyself; much learning hath made thee mad. And though the Son of God had been speaking as never man spake,

spake, yet some who heard him, and those too of the most reputable sort, said, He is mad and hath a devil; why hear ye him? "But there are absurd expressions in the Methodist-writings." I answer, Was there ever a book written wherein an evil eye could not discover an absurdity? Is even the Book of God free in this respect? Rather have not the Infidels of all ages beheld it as nothing but a heap of Absurdies and Contradictions! What wonder then if the Methodist-writings are viewed in the same unfavourable light.

Sixthly. It is objected, that "They are divided among themselves, and often condemn each other with great severity." I answer, Then this is one argument in their favour. For it proves that they are so far honest men, as not to be in league to deceive the world. But they are not divided in any thing essential. They are perfectly agreed, That the whole world lieth in wickedness: that God commandeth all men every where to repent: that there is salvation in none but Christ: that all who believe are justified, and have peace with God: that all such ought to love God and their neighbour; and to rejoice evermore, pray without ceasing, and in every thing give thanks: and to be holy in heart and in life. "But some of

them are Arminians, and others Calvinists." This is very true. The followers of Mr. Wesley are, in general, Arminians; and the followers of the late Mr. Whitefield are, in general, Calvinists. But what for that! Is such a division any thing new or extraordinary? Was there not, at least, since the days of St. Austin, a mixture of those who are now called Calvinists and Arminians, I will not say, in every Christian nation, or Christian city; but in every Christian congregation of any note? Is it not so now all over England, Scotland, Ireland, Holland, France, Spain, Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Italy, America, and in the East and West-Indies? If so, where is the harm if such a division is found among the Methodists? "But they bitterly condemn each other." I answer, Sometimes they do; but not in general. And if they did it oftener, it would be no wonder, seeing so great a majority of mankind are incapable of viewing any point with liberality and candour. This frailty of human nature, has been matter of lamentation to candid men in every age and nation; but not more so than to thousands of both parties which constitute "The Methodists."

Seventhly. It is said, "The Teachers of Methodism are a company of illiterate mechanics."

I answer,

I answer, They are not more illiterate than the Prophets and Apostles: they are not more illiterate than the teachers of various other denominations; such as the Quakers, Anabaptists, Moravians, and some Independants: they are not more illiterate than some who have been ordained ministers of the Church of England, who did not so much as know a Verb from a Noun: particularly the Rev. Mr. T. who was originally a Merry-andrew, then a Deacon, then a Priest, then a Justice of the Peace, if not of the Quorum!

Again, They are not more illiterate, or more ignorant of the the laws of God, than Thousands of Magistrates are of the laws of their country: particularly than multitudes of Mayors and Aldermen, who have the care, not only of our corporate-towns, but even of our Cities! Now if an illiterate Magistrate, by looking into the Statute-Laws, can tell what is legal and illegal; what pains and punishments belong to evil-doers, and what praise to them that do well; why may not a Methodist teacher (suppose he is equally illiterate) by looking into the Laws of God, tell what is required therein, on the one hand, and what forbidden on the other; and also what Rewards and Punishments belong to obedi-

ence, and disobedience? And if he *declares* what these rewards and punishments are, and adds warnings, instructions and exhortations, this is nothing more than what is constantly done, by every illiterate Magistrate in the world.

Again, They are not more illiterate than myriads of those who are heads of families, who are supposed to be able to instruct all under their care, in the duties they owe to God, their neighbours and one another; and to make use of arguments, warnings, and exhortations, to engage their whole household to love and fear God, and live in obedience to the king, and in love and charity with their neighbours. Now if every master of a family is supposed (without the help of an university education) to be capable of doing this; why may we not suppose a Methodist teacher capable of doing the same, when Five, Ten, Twenty or Fifty families are met together?

But after all this noise about their illiteracy, it is well known there have been men of very considerable learning among them from the beginning: men who have had a regular education, and who have acquired considerable renown, even in our universities. There have also been others, who in the course of thirty or forty years, have made themselves well acquainted with the learned

ed languages; with polemical and practical divinity, and with various other arts and sciences. And as for the rest, seeing they have been wise to win souls, they need not regard who clamours against them; as he is the best Physician who performs the most cures.

But "They are mechanics." So were Kings and Prophets, under the law; so was Christ and his Apostles, under the Gospel; so were Bishops, Priests and Deacons in later times; and so are many who now bear some of the highest offices, both in Church and State. If then it is no objection to these that they were once mechanics; where is the Candour? where is the Justice of urging it against the Methodists? especially as it is nowhere said in the Bible, that every preacher of the Gospel must be a fine Gentleman.

Eighthly. "But the teachers of Methodism are idle, mercenary men." I answer, As they generally ride, through all weathers, Three, Four, and sometimes Five Thousand miles a year; and, in that time, preach, with all their might, Five, Six, Seven or Eight Hundred sermons; besides giving near as many public exhortation, visiting the sick, and speaking to every member under their care, four or five times a year; writing letters, and enforcing every other part of the Methodist

dist discipline; it is impossible they should be idle. On the other hand, I know from long experience, that there are few ways of life attended with more fatigue, and so likely to destroy a good constitution, as that of a preacher among the Methodists. I myself have often been so wearied with the labours of a single Sabbath, that I could scarce sleep at all the first night, but imperfectly the second, and not soundly till the third. Now I ask every impartial man, if this is a life of idleness, whose is a life of labour? whose is a life of Toil?

But "They are mercenary: their aim is only to enrich themselves." I answer, If this was really their aim, never were men more disappointed. For I defy any man living to shew so much as a single preacher who has enriched himself, even by preaching for the long space of forty or fifty years. It is true, a few of them (perhaps one in ten) have got a little by marriage; though perhaps, not a quarter, or a tenth part of what they would have done, had they staid at home. And as to the rest, it is known to thousands, that they never aimed at more than a scanty allowance to provide plain food and raiment for the present; and if they got it (which was not always the case) they were therewith content.

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And as a farther proof of their not being mercenary men I add, had they been such, would God have owned their labours as he has done? Was it ever known, from the beginning of the world, that impostors and deceivers turned thousands upon thousands from the evil of their way? Did any of this sort ever go, with their lives in their hands, to the most ignorant, daring, and savage people; and so preach Christ to them, as to constrain them to forsake all their sins, to turn to God with full purpose of heart, and to walk in the narrow way, the way of holiness, to their lives end? Yet all this have the Teachers of Methodism been doing for Forty or Fifty years together, in the face of the sun; and all this they continue to do unto this day, notwithstanding every discouragement thrown in their way, and every temporal inconvenience they labour under. Therefore I conclude that they are not a set of idle, mercenary deceivers; but, rather, men raised up and sent of God, to reform a guilty land.

F I N I S.

A H Y M N

GLORY to God, whose sovèrign grace,
 Hath animated senseless stones;
 Callèd us to stand before his face,
 And raisèd us into Abraham's sons.

The people that in darkness lay,
 In sin and error's deadly shade,
 Have seen a glorious gospel-day,
 In Jesu's lovely face displayèd.

Thou only, Lord, the work hast done,
 And barèd thine arm in all our fight,
 Hast made the reprobates thine own,
 And claimèd the outcasts as thy right.

For this the saints lift up their voice,
 And ceaseless praise to thee is givèn:
 For this the hosts above rejoice,
 We raise the happiness of heavèn.

Suffice, that for the season past,
 Hell's horrid language fillèd our tongues;
 We all thy words behind us cast,
 And loudly sang the drunkard's songs.

But Oh the power of grace divine!
 In hymns we now our voices raise;
 Loudly in strange hosannas join,
 And blasphemies are turnèd to praise!

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